

Singing to Learn in an All-Select Choir
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TESOL, Baltimore, 2003, revised 2013
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Thesis:

This study examines how teaching pronunciation and cultural awareness directly through an all-select choral experience can have positive impact on L2 language acquisition.

Context

I have taught music in the classroom and on rotary. The school board I teach for uses a Grade 1-6 Kodaly curriculum which expands the North American repertoire to include international folksongs. I was interested in knowing what impact language tasks such as pronunciation, phrasing, reading and performing choral texts in the choral classroom have on L2 acquisition.

Choral Rehearsals provided an additional opportunity for language learners to engage in pronunciation practice, chanting, phrasing, breathing, rhythm and rhyme exercises, attention to consonants and vowels, pitch-matching and solfege to encourage accurate listening and production skills and cultural awareness through a multi-ethnic repertoire.

I was interested in answering the following questions: What impact might weekly rehearsals of an all-select choir have on L2 students? How do specific choral activities--tone blending, intonation, phrasing, reading and performing choral text--help to improve sub skills necessary for listening comprehension--and therefore impact student literacy? I turn to the research literature to examine possible connections between the enriched input of folk music, culture teaching and literacy.

Survey of the Literature on Culture, Music and Language Teaching:

Byram and Kramsch's research on Relationship Between Culture and Language (2008)

Recent studies focus on the seamless relationship between L2 teaching and target culture teaching, especially over the last decade with the writings of scholars such as Byram and Kramsch. People involved in language teaching have again begun to understand the intertwined relation between culture and language.

It has been emphasized that without the study of culture, teaching L2 is inaccurate and incomplete. For L2 students, language study seems senseless if they know nothing about the people who speak the target language or the country in which the target language is spoken. Acquiring a new language means a lot more than the manipulation of syntax and lexicon. According to Bada,

"the need for cultural literacy in English Language Teaching arises mainly from the fact that most language learners, not exposed to cultural elements of the society in question, seem to encounter significant hardship in communicating meaning to native speakers." In addition, nowadays the L2 culture is presented as an interdisciplinary core in many L2 curricula designs and textbooks.

In addition to learning about world cultures, English Language students also experience specific language tasks during an all-select choral rehearsal, such as listening to and matching vowels and consonants, breath support, phrasing, singing for meaning, and reading and performing choral text.

Elmeroth, Yeh and Inose's research on Positive School Climate for ESL Students (2003)

Schools that promote a sense of belonging may be creating environments that maximize student learning, and promoting a sense of school belonging may be especially important for English language learners (ELL) as target language fluency is inversely related to the stress associated with adjusting to the majority culture.

One way to increase a sense of belonging in the elementary panel is to promote an extracurricular activity where everyone participates. Choirs, sports activities and social clubs all promote ways to improve school climate. But the all-select choir is the only corporate activity that involves students experiencing language tasks directly and intensively.

Shaw's research on Culturally Responsive Choral Music Education. (2012)

This article describes ways that music education can be made more culturally responsive, or congruent with the orientations of culturally diverse students. Music education in the United States has historically been based on Eurocentric frameworks that may no longer be applicable in an increasingly multicultural society. For the many teachers charged with the responsibility of teaching students from backgrounds other than their own, there is a demonstrated need to develop pedagogical practices that respond to cultural diversity.

In response to this need, this article builds on an abundance of literature addressing culturally responsive pedagogy in general education to apply the principles specifically to choral music education. In addition to describing culturally responsive approaches to repertoire selection, rehearsal technique, and curriculum design, the article discusses how choral music education can go beyond a surface treatment of diverse repertoire to one that develops students' socio-political competence and empowers them toward social action.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. research on the need to belong and its effect on cognitive processes (1995).

Consistent with the belongingness hypothesis, this study explores how people form social attachments readily under most conditions and resist the dissolution of existing bonds. Belonging appears to have multiple and strong effects on emotional patterns and on cognitive processes.

Richard Schmidtt's Research on the Role of Unconscious in Language Learning (1990)

Schmidtt examines the role of consciousness and looks at three questions in second language learning related to the role of consciousness in input processing: whether conscious awareness at the level of 'noticing' is necessary for language learning (the subliminal learning issue); whether it is necessary to consciously 'pay attention' in order to learn (the incidental learning issue); and whether learner hypotheses based on input are the result of conscious insight and understanding or an unconscious process of abstraction or implicit learning issue.

Schmidtt concludes that subliminal language learning is impossible, and that noticing features is a necessary and sufficient condition for converting input to intake. Incidental learning, on the other hand, is clearly both possible and effective when the demands of a task focus attention on what is to be learned.

"Paying attention" is a necessary prerequisite to deep, internalized learning, and some forms of implicit learning are a by-product of this, according to Schmidtt. Singing activities offer the best of both worlds: attention is paid to pronunciation, phrasing and vocabulary, but also feeds the unconscious with rhythm and rhyme.

Patel and Daniele: The Impact of Music on Language Learning (2003)

Recent research documents the impact of specific linguistic experience on hearing musical rhythm. Palmer & Kelly earlier explored the role of musical and linguistic knowledge on song production. Chen-Hafteck has examined the role of experience with tonal versus non-tonal languages. McGill psychologist and Canada Research Chair Caroline Palmer is world renowned for drawing attention to the performance aspects of music as opposed to the perceptual aspects.

She has pioneered the search for commonalities between speech and music. She and Frank Russo co-lead a team of psycho-linguists and linguists (Cichocki, Forrester, Lempert), and psychologists (Della Bella, Lantz, Sinclair, Stewart) in systematic comparisons between the development of singing and speaking, across age and culture, so as to define the commonalities and boundaries between song and speech.

It is the incantatory nature of rhythm and rhyme--and this seems true of singing and poetry in all cultures-- that allows children to experience language in a "whole" way. Language teachers value the practice ESL students engage in when they are singing songs. This activity mimics the fluency they will eventually experience, before they have acquired all the elements of the new language.

Carmen Fonseca's Research on How Music Affects Language Acquisition (2004)

Fonseca considers the value of relating music and language in the EFL classroom. From an ontological point of view, sounds are the roots of both music and speech. Our 'melodic approach' is based on the evidence that musicality of speech has an effect not only on the pronunciation skills of English Language students but also on their entire language acquisition process. Fonseca's research attempts to uncover the "flow" or "patterning" quality that singing has on the language student.

Cook's (2000) research on forms of language play: rhythm and repetition in children's verse.

Cook argues that when studying L1 acquisition, linguists have limited their investigation to children's verbal responses. But Cook asks us to consider what is happening in the mind of the pre-linguistic child when they listen to rhymes or verse that are pervasive in their environment. He says that children are innately predisposed to respond to rhythm, rhyme, and repetition. He then pursues the idea that traditional children's rhymes and stories play an important part in language development. And he suggests that this love of rhythm, rhyme, and language play continues into adulthood and has a role in shaping linguistic and social environments.

Chard and Osborn's work on Phonics and Word Recognition Instruction in Early Reading Programs (1999).

The authors suggest that a beginning reading program should include the following elements; activities that follow a sequence of instruction that progresses from easier to more difficult tasks and from larger to smaller units, for example:

- Rhyming words.
- Dividing sentences into words.
- Dividing words into syllables.
- Segmenting and blending onsets and rimes.
- Identifying beginning, medial, and ending sounds in spoken words.
- Segmenting and blending individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words.

Each of these activities are reinforced in a good elementary choral program.

Escalda, Júlia; Lemos, Stela Maris Aguiar and Franca, Cecília Cavalieri's work on Auditory processing and phonological awareness skills of five-year-old children with and without musical experience. (2011)

Auditory processing and phonological awareness of groups of 5-year-old children with and without musical experience were investigated. Participants were 56 5-year-old subjects of both genders, 26 in the Study Group, consisting of children with musical experience, and 30 in the Control Group, consisting of children without musical experience. All participants were assessed with the Simplified Auditory Processing Assessment and Phonological Awareness Test and the data was statistically analyzed.

There was a statistically significant difference between the results of the sequential memory test for verbal and non-verbal sounds with four stimuli, phonological awareness tasks of rhyme recognition, phonemic synthesis and phonemic deletion. Analysis of multiple binary logistic regression showed that, with exception of the sequential verbal memory with four syllables, the observed difference in subjects' performance was associated with their musical experience. Musical experience improves auditory and meta-linguistic abilities of 5-year-old children.

Broer's (2003) research on *using Music to Support Language Acquisition*.

Based on a conference paper on how North American folk music can be a resource to teach genre and language awareness, this study concludes that various folk music genres are appropriate for developing language awareness and teaching text form in elementary classrooms.

Neuerburg's (2012) research on the impact of vowels on pitch finding and intonation in the movable-do solmization system.

The modern movable-Do solmization system based on syllables devised by Guido d'Arezzo was modified and pieced together over centuries by various scholars and pedagogues, each with their own rationale. To date, considerations of the movable-Do system have not sufficiently examined the effects of the vowels contained within its solfège syllables. While vowels have been thoroughly analyzed among vocal pedagogues, that information has not been adequately transferred to the realm of aural theory.

Individual vowels contain perceptual qualities and intonational tendencies, due to their physiological articulation and acoustic properties. This study relates vowel characteristics with the solfège syllables used in the movable-Do solmization system, and explores potential implications for intonation awareness.

Sample and Context

I taught music on rotary to over 450 students, two times per week. Close to 40% of the student population spoke another language at home and were in various stages of learning English at school. I ran an all-select choir for 80 Kindergarten students, 120 Primary students and 100 Junior students once per week, within the teaching day. Choir was not optional and was not extra-curricular. The weekly choir rehearsal involved clapping games, rhythmic echoes, canon exercises

pronunciation, listening and responding, rhythmic and melodic activities and an exposure to repertoire and singing cultures from around the world.

I used a combination of resources. I chose four or five of the most accessible choral works from the Kodaly Choir Festival Repertoire, folksongs from the Waterloo Board of Education's Music Curriculum and *Voiceworks*. The following table shows, in part, the national and international variety of resources.

By the end of the school year, the all-select choir in the primary and junior division had mastered at least 10 choral selections each. In the classroom music program they were required to read, compose, improvise and perform choral and instrumental repertoire.

Research Plan:

1. To examine a study of how musical experience improves auditory and meta-linguistic abilities of children.
2. To formulate a general program of intonation practice in choral rehearsals--to focus on accurate intonation.
 - i) To formulate an ongoing diagnostic for ***intonation sensitivity and accuracy***: pitch matching tasks in solfa.
 - ii) An assessment for intonation accuracy: A final pitch matching task in solfa.

Research Protocol:

Four parts were completed for each subject:

- i) **Echo-singing** after a teacher's model. (adjustments made for student's singing range.)
Sample: do, do do re mi fa fa mi so la mi do.
- ii) **Sight Singing** read from solfa on a staff.
- iii) **Dictation** of solfa melody from teacher's model in classroom choral setting.
- iv) **Pitch-matching of solfa melody "in echo" after a teacher's model.** (adjustments made for student's singing range.) Sample: do, do' do' ti do' la so mi fa re do.

Scoring and Assessment

Subjects' recordings of singing aloud and sight singing were scored by one examiner for school assessment purposes. A random selection of twenty results were selected from a group of 120 student results. Sight singing was the most difficult task to perform. Dictation results improved with each teaching cycle. If simpler choral tasks such as singing a scale in tune or echo singing from a model proved difficult, sight singing and dictation were also difficult.

Scoring Scheme:

Results from Solfege Tests

| | Level 1: limited accuracy in intonation of solfa 0/10-4.9/10 | Level 2: some accuracy in intonation of solfa 5/10-6.9/10 | Level 3: consistently accurate in intonation of solfa 7/10-8.4/10 | Level 4: highly accurate in intonation of solfa 8.5/10-10/10 |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| Solfa Scale: do, re mi fa so la ti do' so do /10 | | 1 | 14 | 5 |
| (echo) Solfa Melody: do mi so so la ti do', so mi do /10 | | 1 | 12 | 7 |
| (sight singing) Solfa Intervals: do re, do mi, do fa, do so, do la /10 | 3 | 3 | 10 | 4 |
| Solfa Dictation: do re mi do, do' ti do' so mi do. /10 | | 2 | 10 | 8 |

Results of Student Survey on Valued Tasks/Activities in Music Class

| Student Attitudes on Music Tasks and Activities | Top-Highly Agree | High-Agree | Mid-disagree | Low-Strongly Disagree |
|---|------------------|------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Cultural Awareness through multi-cultural Choral repertoire and Drumming Unit | 15/20 | 2/20 | 2/20 | 1/20 |
| Learning French Through Song | 5/20 | 11/20 | 2/20 | 2/20 |
| Using Solfa and Rhythmic syllables for skill-building | 4/20 | 9/20 | 4/20 | 3/20 |
| Using Recorders in the Musical Instrument Unit | 17/20 | 1/20 | 1/20 | 1/20 |
| Whole-class group activities vs. Small or Individual Choral Activities | 10/20 | 5/20 | 3/20 | 2/20 |

Implications:

Singing in an all-select choir exposed all students, including second language learners, to the culture and languages of Canada, North America and the World through song. Simple choral tasks such as pronunciation work, phrasing, choral reading and performance were also emphasized. Choral blend and intonation improved when each subtask was taught, practiced, reinforced and performed for an individual student test. There was no difference between the ability of L2 learners and native speakers to perform successfully on solfege tests.

Appendices

A. Multicultural Song Literature used in the classroom

| | |
|--|---------|
| Canadian and American Choral Repertoire | 5 works |
| Alberta, Manitoba, B.C., Saskatchewan, North | 5 works |
| Ontario | 3 songs |
| Quebec | 3 songs |
| Maritimes, Newfoundland | 4 songs |
| Native | 2 songs |
| United States (Including Folk, Spirituals, Pop, Jazz and Gospel) | 4 songs |

B. Repertoire for Me to We

Wade in the Water

Siyahamba

Hymn to Freedom

Water in Me Eye

Joyful, Joyful

Lions are Sleeping Tonight

C. Drumming Unit:

"World Music Drumming", Will Schmid, "Now's The Time", Doug Goodkin

Afro-Cuban Drumming Video, MusicPlay Grade 6 Curriculum Binder--Denis Gagne.

Materials: Djembe, Sogo, Xylophone, Frame Drums, Hand Drums, bodhrán, tabla, cabasa, agogo

Bell, cowbell, guiro, bongos, maracas, claves, stringed instruments.

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| Introduction to drumming: solfa syllables, clapping games, circle games | Discussing Timbre, intro to "High Life" putting beat on body, then on drum | High Life ensemble with Songs: Take Time in Life and concept of isorhythm | Xylophone ensemble: Take time in Life | Latin American Instruments, ensemble Ma Teodora |
| Xylophone arrangement for "Linstead Market" | Blues/Jazz Musicplay wordsmithing | Chapter 6, Vocal Blues | Chapter 7: Jazz Blues, | Chapter 8: Jazz Standards |
| "Stomp" Bucket Drumming | Irish Drumming | Body and Found Percussion Ensemble/Creations | Improvisation on drums, xylophones | Tabla Technique (Video) |
| Afro-cuban drumming technique (video) | Presentations | Presentations | Presentations | Invited Speaker |

B. Sample Repertoire List:

i. J'entends le Moulin--Emily Crocker

J'entends le moulin ((I Hear the Wind Mill)). Arranged by Emily Crocker. For Choral (2-Part). Discovery Choral. 12 pages. Published by Hal Leonard (HL.8551983).
 Hear the steady ticka-tacka of the mill wheel in this brisk setting of a French Canadian folksong. Use the pronunciation guide on the VoiceTrax CD or on the inside cover to practice the French lyrics, this selection is easily learned and fun to sing! VoiceTrax CD also available. Performance Time: Approx. 2:15. **Musical teaching points: Head tone, especially for final “coda” section, a canon, two part texture which broadens to three part texture and the repetitive rhythmic pattern: ti-ti-ka ti ti, tika-tika ti ti.**

French settlers brought music with them when inhabiting what is now Nova Scotia, Quebec and other areas throughout Canada. Since the arrival of French music in Canada, there has been much intermixing with the Celtic music of Anglo-Canada. French-Canadian folk music is generally performed to accompany dances such as the jig, jeux, dansé, ronde, cotillion, and quadrille. The fiddle is perhaps the most common instrument utilized and is used by virtuosos such as Jean Carignan, Jos Bouchard, and Joseph Allard. Also common is the diatonic button accordion, played by the likes of Philippe Bruneau and Alfred Montmarquette. Spoons, bones, and jaw harps are also played in this music.

ii. American Folk Rhapsody arr. Linda Spevacek, SSA: medley of Cindy, Simple Gifts, and Pick a Bale of Cotton.

A good concert or festival feature, this creative setting of *Cindy; Simple Gifts* and *Pick A Bale Of Cotton* contains a medley and “mash up” of three folk tunes. Accessible to choirs with limited rehearsal time, it's arranged in a unique, fresh style, with optional hand claps to add to the fun! **Musical Teaching points: head tone, light rhythmic style, precision of harmonic interpolations, clarity of diction.**

Much of the folk music tradition in the United States was preserved by community singing groups. These songs were preserved in a variety of ways, including the Shape Note song book. Shape notes are a music notation designed to facilitate congregational and community singing. The notation, introduced in 1801, became a popular teaching device in American singing schools. Shapes were added to the note heads in written music to help singers find pitches within major and minor scales without the use of more complex information found in key signatures on the staff. Through the work of religious communities, a diverse repertoire had developed that ranged from the simple melodies of Shaker song to the rich harmonies of shape-note hymns and simple

folk tunes so called because the shape of the note - rather than its position on the staff - indicated its pitch.

iii). It Don't Mean a Thing, If It Ain't Got That Swing--Duke Ellington, Roger Emerson arrangement

It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing) by Duke Ellington (1899-1974) and Irving Mills (1894-1985). Arranged by Roger Emerson. For Choral (2-Part). Discovery Jazz. 12 pages. Published by Hal Leonard (HL.8551779). A true musical classic now available in the Discovery Jazz Series. Expertly arranged for younger choirs this is the perfect introduction to the music known as "Swing." Available separately: 3-Part Mixed, 2-Part and ShowTrax CD. Performance Time: Approx. 2:30. **Musical Teaching points: 4/4 is "felt" in 12/8. Jazz vocal tone is "breathy", vibrato is used sparingly, energetic approach to all notes and internal and ending consonants are de-emphasized.**

Phil Mattson and Voices Iowa presented "Vocal Jazz: History, Literature, Technique".

The roots of jazz music were very much vocal, with field hollers and ceremonial chants, but while the blues maintained a strong vocal tradition, with singers such as Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith heavily influencing the progress of American popular music in general, early jazz bands only featured vocalists periodically, albeit those with a more "bluesy" tone of voice; one of the first "jazz" recordings, the 1917 Original Dixieland Jass Band recordings featured one Sarah Martin as vocalist. It was Louis Armstrong who established singing as a distinct art form in jazz, realising that a singer could improvise in the same manner as instrumentalist, and establishing scat singing as a central pillar of the jazz vocal art.

With the end of prohibition in the United States, a more "danceable" form of jazz music arose, giving birth to the Swing era, and with it big bands such as those led by Count Basie, Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Tommy Dorsey, Jimmie Lunceford, Glenn Miller, Artie Shaw and Chick Webb. Many of the great post war jazz singers sang with these bands in the infancy of their careers.

The Phil Mattson Singers presented a workshop on Sunday morning demonstrating all the elements of Jazz. Phil Mattson, their director has written arrangements that are used by Manhattan Transfer, The Four Freshmen, The Real Group, Chanticleer, the Dale Warland Singers.

The group sang arrangements of

"Almighty God/Heaven" by Duke Ellington arr. Duke Ellington,
Is God a Three-Letter word for Love?, Father Forgive.
Accentuate the Positive, by Billie May, ed. Phil Mattson
Evening Prayer, by E Humperdinck, arr. Phil Mattson
I'll Be Seeing You. Irving Kahal and Sammy Fain, arr. Phil Mattson

iv). Hymn to Freedom--Oscar Peterson

Recognised as one of Oscar Peterson's most significant compositions, Hymn to Freedom was written in 1962 and was swiftly embraced by people all over the world as the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement. For inspiration, Peterson drew upon various church renderings of spirituals recalled from his childhood in Montreal. He aimed to maintain the unadorned, yet poignant quality of these early Baptist hymns. Harriette Hamilton collaborated with him on the lyrics to express in simple language the hope for unity, peace and dignity. ***Musical teaching points: head tone, solfa rendering of octave jumps, open, relaxed vowels, slight “swing”.***

v). Yonder Come Day--Georgia Sea Islands Spiritual, arranged by Judith Cook Tucker.

Traditional

Based on a traditional Georgia Sea Islands spiritual, with a rhythmic speech section, this is very effective in performance, especially with optional audience participation! ***Musical teaching points: sustained breathing, diction, awareness of in tune harmonic intervals and projecting text while clapping.***

A Georgia Sea Island “shout song” often sung during the New Year’s Eve “Watch Night Service.” This song was accompanied by a ring shout—a praise ritual with movements rooted in West African dance. As the song was being sung, shouters would move in a counterclockwise circle in a shuffling motion. Traditionally, singers provided accompaniment by beating a stick on the floor, stomping their feet, and clapping.

Based on a traditional Georgia Sea Islands spiritual, with an additional rhythmic speech section, this arrangement has new words and music by Judith Cook Tucker. It includes complete cultural context and suggestions for performance. Two or three easy parts (great for concerts, where the audience can join in on the chorus); a cappella. Teaching points: keeping held notes in tune against a second and third harmonic part. Supported breathing and blending of vowels is imperative.

vi). The Moon-- Andy Beck

Written especially for two-part choirs, this inquisitive piece features lyrical unisons, echo singing, and sensible duet harmonies. A haunting piano motive represents the moon throughout as the childlike text ignites your choir's collective imagination. "O moon, shining in the night... come again tomorrow night..." A marvelous, luminous nocturne for young voices! Highly recommended! ***Teaching points: uniformity of vowels, vowel sound blend, solfa for in tune harmonies, precision of consonants, and the difficulty of “placing” the final open fifth using head tone and inner ear.***

vii). Lake Isle of Innisfree- Eleanor Daley (Canadian Composer)

'The Lake Isle of Innisfree by Eleanor Daley, text is the famous poem by Yeats.. For SSA choir and piano. Upper Voices. Secular, Choral Leaflet. Vocal score. 8 pages. Duration 3'. Published by Oxford University Press (OU.9780193426528). ISBN 9780193426528. Secular, Choral Leaflet. 10 x 7 inches. For SSA and piano A simple, delightful setting of a Yeats poem which embraces nature's beauty and the secret joy of solitude. Suitable for concert use. **Teaching points: clarity of diction, purity of vowels, supported breathing for phrases, harmonic delicacy, head tone.**

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